

From Heaven

Acts 2: 2, Acts 9: 3, Acts 11: 5

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When the apostle Peter wrote his first epistle to those Jews who had embraced the faith of Christianity in accepting Jesus as the Christ, he was led by the Spirit of God to emphasize the essentially heavenly character of the faith they had believed, for Christianity is a heavenly system in origin, character, and destiny. He first assures them that the truths which they had believed had been made known unto them, "by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven" (1 Peter 1: 12). Before believing the gospel their hopes had been centred in Zion, the temple, and the land under the beneficent sway of their long promised Messiah. They now believed that Jesus was their Messiah though the nation had rejected Him as such, and the apostle goes on to inform them that though He is rejected on earth, He is now in heaven. "Who is gone into **heaven**, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him" (1 Peter 3: 22). He also assures them that consequent upon their having believed the gospel their hope was not now to be centred in Zion on earth, for they had been called "to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in **heaven for you**" (1: 4).

The three references at the head of this paper all contain the phrase "from heaven" and in combination shew that the Christian company is a heavenly organism. Luke in his gospel was inspired to write an account of the beginnings of these things and send it to the most noble Theophilus to assure him of "those things which are most surely believed among us". He later wrote the book of the Acts to the same person to enlighten him further concerning "all that Jesus began both to do and teach" (Acts 1: 1). All that our Lord began to do and teach when on earth is now being continued from **heaven**, and from there light is now shining in this world to enlighten men for blessing. We do well to keep in mind that this blessing has reached us **from heaven**, however important it is to remember it began on earth.

Our first reference in the book of the Acts is to the descent of the Holy Spirit into this world, coming from an ascended Christ. "And suddenly there came a **sound from heaven** as of a rushing mighty wind and it filled all the house where they were sitting." It is important for us ever to keep in mind that the real true uniting force which has bound together the church as a living organism is the Holy Spirit of God Who came down from heaven with this object in view. The Spirit did not come from any earthly religious centre, but "from heaven." Heaven then is the point of control for the Church of God. Can we doubt that if the Spirit came from heaven it was with a view to attaching us to Christ Who is in heaven and so accomplish through the Church the desire of heaven for the blessing of mankind?

Though not seen as our Lord had been, the coming of the Spirit is described as "a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind." He was a moving, powerful, unseen force, yet withal indicating that He was here, in demonstrating His power and control of that company, witnessed by the wonderful effects which took place on that Pentecostal day. It is not in mind to trace out the wonders recorded in this chapter, but rather to emphasize that the Person Who gave power for it all came "**from heaven**." Another matter worthy of note in this verse is, "it filled all the house where they were sitting." How this ought to assure us that the Holy Spirit has every resource for every servant on every occasion which has for its objective the advancement of the interests of heaven. May we never depend upon any other power in our service for our Lord.

Our second reference stands related to Saul of Tarsus. "And as he journeyed, he came near

Damascus: and suddenly there shined round about him a light **from heaven**." This time it is Jesus from Whom that light shone, and while causing temporary blindness to the physical eyes of Saul of Tarsus we may venture to say it shone through Spiritual eyes into his darkened heart. This paragon of the law, this intolerant religious bigot discovered himself to be "the chief of sinners" as the result of that light shining in. May we not rightly conclude that at that moment Saul of Tarsus died and Paul the apostle was born? What else but this light from heaven could have effected such a great transformation? Writing of this at a later date we hear him saying, "For God Who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ" (2 Cor. 4: 6). From the moment that light shone into his heart he became the willing bondsman of our Lord Jesus Christ. No earthly power, nor law of Sinai, could have produced such a wonderful change, for it virtually turned a wolf into a shepherd. Such is the character and power of that light "from heaven".

In our third reference Peter is giving an account to the apostles at Jerusalem to explain why he took the journey to Caesarea to hold a gospel meeting in the house of a Gentile centurion. "I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, a certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down **from heaven** by four corners: and it came even to me." He carefully emphasized that this vision was "from heaven" lest the others might think he had presumed to do this thing of himself. We apprehend this time that the vision was given by God. Following the conversion of Saul of Tarsus as a necessary preliminary to the gospel going out to the Gentiles, Peter, to whom had been given the keys of the kingdom, acting under the control of this vision from heaven is led to be the first to preach the gospel to the Gentiles in this public way. We can be assured by the words which he addressed to Cornelius that only a light and a command from heaven would ever have induced him to be found in such circumstances (Acts 10: 28). Nor would the apostles have been satisfied without this explanation; but who would gainsay this command of God given in such a striking way? To every right-minded saint, the commands of heaven must be obeyed.

We note that all three of these heavenly movements are gathered together in this explanation which Peter was led to give. It was the Holy Spirit Who came down as that sound "from heaven". It was the Lord Jesus Christ Who shone upon Saul of Tarsus that light "from heaven". It was God Who gave to Peter the vision of that sheet "from heaven". So in this discourse Peter recounts that as he was speaking, "the Holy Ghost fell on them." Along with this they "believed on the Lord Jesus Christ". And he concludes by assuring them "Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life" (Acts 11: 15-18).

Let us ever thank God for these heavenly things which assure us that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are all interested and active in bringing blessing to both Jews and Gentiles today.